

## MAINE RURAL AMERICORPS GRANT REVIEW (12/2018)

<b>Task Force Final Recommendation:</b>	Fund with requirement corrections and clarifications be made.
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**RFP Due Date:** 11/30/2018

**Application Number :** 19AC209948

**Legal Applicant:** Maine School Admin District 70

**Grant Type:**

- ☒ Cost reimbursement  
☐ Fixed Amount  
☐ Education Award Only

**Project Name:** Access To Success: AmeriCorps Formula

**Project Contact:** Scott Richardson

**MSYs and Slots requested:** 2.1 MSYs – 3 slots @ 1200 hours

**Budget Proposed**

CNCS funds \$ 34,167

Local Match \$ 19,798

Cost per Member \$ 16,270

**Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.**

Parents SAD#70

**Applicant proposes to deliver services: (select what the applicant states in their application that their program will cover:**

- ☐ Within a single municipality  
☐ County-wide in a single County  
☐ Statewide  
☒ Within a single County but not covering the entire County  
☐ Multiple Counties but not Statewide

**Which CNCS focus area does this applicant identify as related to its proposal? Do the applicant's activities in each focus area fall under the type of activities CNCS says are acceptable (see RFP page 82-9)? Do the performance measures chosen match the focus area?**

Focus Area Identified	Activities are within list of acceptable for funding
<input type="checkbox"/> Disaster Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Futures	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic Opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Veterans and Military Families	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Performance Measures	
Do the Service Activity performance measures chosen match the focus area?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Capacity Building performance measures match one of the sets listed in the RFP?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Do the Member Development performance measures exactly match the set provided in the RFP?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

### Executive Summary

Maine School Administrative District #70 (MSAD #70) proposes to have three AmeriCorps members who will provide K-12 Academic Success and 7-12 College/Career Mentoring through tutoring, summer school and interventions in the County of Aroostook in Maine in the towns eight towns served by MSAD #70. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for showing progress towards increased academic achievement, engagement,

social/emotional skills, and college/career planning. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 10 volunteers who will be engaged in mentoring of students. The CNCS investment of \$34,167 will be matched by \$19,798 in public funding and \$0 in private funding.

**Performance measures** (targets proposed for Year 1; targets for years 2 and 3 set in continuations):

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 25

OUTCOME: ED5A: Number of students with improved academic performance

Proposed target: 15

OUTCOME: ED7A: Number of students with decreased disciplinary incidents

Proposed target:

OUTCOME: ED27C: Number of students with improved academic engagement or social-emotional skills

Proposed target: 15

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT – Performance measure not entered as directed in RFP.

CAPACITY BUILDING -- Performance measure not entered as directed in RFP.

**Scoring Detail:**

**Peer Reviewer Consensus Score.** *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring.*

CATEGORY	Qualitative Rating	Points
<b>Rationale &amp; Approach/Program Design Section (50%)</b>		
Need (5)	Adequate	3.35
Intervention (8)	Adequate	5.36
Theory of Change, Evidence, and Logic Model (8)	Weak	2.64
Work Plan Year 1 (8)	Adequate	5.36
Notice Priority (1)	Adequate	0.67
Member training (6)	Adequate	4.02
Member supervision (5)	Adequate	3.35
Member Experience (5)	Adequate	3.35
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identity (3)	Adequate	2.01
<b>Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%</b>		
Organizational Background and Staffing (10)	Strong	10
Compliance and Accountability (15)	Strong	15
<b>Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%</b>		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25)	Adequate	16.75
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>71.86</b>
60-79, Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation		

**Task Force Consensus Score.** *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Score
Program Model	4.95
Past Performance	10.05
Financial Plan	0
Fiscal Systems	10
<b>Total Task Force Score</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Peer Review Score</b>	<b>71.86</b>
<b>Final Score for Applicant</b>	<b>96.86 of 150 potential</b>

#### Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Forward with no corrections/modifications
- ☒ Forward for funding if corrections can be negotiated
- ☐ Do Not Fund

#### Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- Budget calculations, explanations, and amounts need corrections.
- Cost per member needs to conform with maximum set by CNCS for the year
- Member terms of service need to fit within 10-month window and Members need to begin service in spring 2019, not September
- Supervision plan needs changes so supervisors are not administrators with no time for role and, where supervisors were not named, the supervisor needs to be identified.
- Missing performance measures for Member Development and Capacity Building need to be added while Service Activity performance measures should be narrowed to the most relevant.
- Targets of 15 students total - seems low for district-wide program. Is there enough for AmeriCorps members to do?
- Develop and add to proposal the program logic model. (Applicants were directed to not submit this and plan for working with MCCC staff to develop/enter it if selected for award.)

#### Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design. This section covers the community need, service to be performed in response to need, evidence the service will be effective, roles for AmeriCorps and partners, performance measures, and anticipated results for year one.

#### Section: Program Design (50 %)

*Note: CNCS has subdivided this part of the narrative into 5 parts. The comments indicate the part and follow the narrative outline in the RFP.*

#### Need

- Students under achieving - not prepared for college
- Rationale outlined is relevant but general
- The program meets the definition of "rural". The school administration, parents, and the school board were involved in identifying the need. Community members will be engaged in implementing the program through volunteer opportunities.

#### Intervention

- Academic tutoring for K-12 to meet educational, social, emotional growth

- Duration and intensity of intervention addressed
- The proposal meets the requirements of the grant.

#### **Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model**

- 1st year 2.1MSY, 2nd and 3rd year 3MSY. Good measurement system in place. Able to create baseline to improve from.
- Some external support and consideration of future monitoring- but other aspects appear lazy- "If the programs are successful the percentage of success will increase from Year One to year Three as success breeds success."
- The proposal states the change expected and provides measurements. There was only one reference used to indicate that the activity (mentoring) is a successful tool.

#### **Evidence**

- Mentoring will follow the Elements of Effective practice for mentoring. will follow Institute of Education Sciences What Works Clearing House
- National Mentoring Partnership cited. Nothing else
- Evidence presented was weak.
- There is considerable research available on mentoring and models for mentoring programs. The argument that it is appropriate for rural youth with the outcomes desired should have been much stronger. Not successful in making case.

#### **Work Plan for Year One**

- 1200 hr for 3 member the first year which evolves to 1700 in year 2 and 3. 50 students mentored and 40 out of the 50 to achieve academic progress.
- The work plan provides an outline of activities and expected milestones.

#### **Notice Priority**

- Education- in a target county- program meets regulatory requirements
- The focus area is education and meets all regulatory requirements.

#### **Member Training**

- Members will be trained by supervisors- Training will be from mentors/teachers in target course of math and literacy
- The members will receive all required AmeriCorps trainings and will be trained in their project. Description of the training was not in depth.

#### **Member Experience**

- Adequate/Strong in this category. Members will learn nuances of school systems. how to work with students with academic and social issues.
- Some skill building referenced, as well as minor reference to other volunteer and enrichment opportunities.
- Members will gain skills in mentoring and coaching, which will be useful experience for future positions in education. Other volunteer activities are available outside of school hours should members choose to do so. They will be encouraged to connect with other members across the state and will attend additional training pertinent to their position in the school district. Reflection will be a natural part of their position as educators.

#### **Member Supervision**

- with 4 identified supervisors- My concern if all agree on action plan.
- Top level supervisors in a decentralized manner may not be suitable for AmeriCorps Members, especially without stronger trainings
- Members will have several supervisors throughout their service year. The extent of supervision was not indicated.

### **Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification**

- AmeriCorp ID will be on clothing worn. Team Members will be introduced to the community and to town officials. There will be media coverage of the program.
- Have to wear the uniform- not to show status- but affiliate with AmeriCorps
- Members will wear AmeriCorps gear and will be known to the community as AmeriCorps members.

### **Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)**

#### **Organizational Background and Staffing**

- Strong organization back by MSAD#70 with high staffing support
- Wide support team identified, but little details on their experience hosting AmeriCorps for long-term projects
- MSAD 70 has been operational for 60 years and has the appropriate staff in place to run the district.

#### **Compliance and Accountability**

- Schools have a strong financial accountability system with layers of checks and balances as well as outside audits
- Strict fiscal policy mentioned, but minimal details provided
- As a school district, MSAD 70 has strong policies in place to safeguard fiscal accountability.

### **Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)**

- Budget appears to be adequate for the program- aligns with the narrative and justifies cost to the plan. However the first year is over the allowable \$/MSY. But years 2 and 3 would be below the \$/MSY
- Aligns with budget narrative, nothing out of the ordinary
- The average cost per MY is below the maximum set by CNCS. Match is less than CNCS funding.

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**SUMMARY APPRAISAL 1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? Yes (3)**

#### **Comments:**

- Address a challenge for rural America and especially Maine.
- Demonstrated need for mentoring
- I believe they have all of the tools necessary for the proposed activities. Support for the program is top down, which generally lend itself to success. Parent and community involvement will be paramount to success.

#### **What elements of the proposal are unclear?**

- How do you supervise 3 AmeriCorp members with 4 different supervisors.
- How the grant will create lasting change in school district after the grant period ends.
- None.

#### **What else do you have to say about this proposal?**

- It meets the intention of the educational goals and provides an avenue for student to prepare for college.
- 3 AmeriCorps Members may be too many, I would recommend 1, then scaling up after they have demonstrated capacity.
- The narrative was basic but addressed the requirements of the proposal. More evidence and more in depth narration would have made this a strong proposal.

## **Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:**

Program Model. *This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and its demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.*

- Program addresses the education focus area by proposing an intervention aimed at improving academic success. Note that 2 interventions are proposed – tutoring and college and career mentoring. The need could have been much better defined and documented. Other than a reference to 65% of students on free/reduced lunch, no data presented on student performance. Nothing documented re: career mentoring. Clearly an effort to supplement the inadequate ability of the district to meet these needs. Some focus on increasing volunteerism to support the programs, particularly on the mentoring aspect. An implication that there is a hope that if this program is successful, there might be an opportunity to make the case for more school funding to continue the program. Academic success among economically and socially challenged students is a significant issue in Maine. Would have been helpful to have data on the total school population broken down by K-6 and 7-12; numbers in each group who are free/reduced lunch; numbers of students not meeting proficiency; numbers currently receiving an intervention, etc. Program primarily focuses on its impact on the students receiving services. This seems appropriate, although the district appears to be interested in expanding its use of volunteers, which may be required for this effort to be sustainable into the future. No question that the program serves a rural population. I'm not sure, however, that there math works. They are looking to tutor 50 students for 30 minutes a day. That would require each tutor, at 8 hours per day, to tutor 16 students. With two students assigned, that runs up to 36 students, a shortfall of 14. The other AC member will primarily be mentoring for 1 hour per week per 25 students. That seems a more reasonable task. Model is permitted. Circumstances are applicable to other communities. Organization has some understanding of volunteer management, although recognizes the area as a weakness. Evidence supporting the proposed interventions is weak to nonexistent. Proposal overall is poorly written and could have been much stronger.
- The Program has potential to be adequate, but there is concern about how MSAD #70 will be able to adjust their programming to meet the required number of hours. School calendars and start dates of programming tends to be highly regulated by State statute and regulations. Adjusting the program timeline and dates may be extremely difficult. As was noted in the Staff Review, usually the volunteering supervision happens at the building level and not at the district level, this adds more to the problematic nature of providing the AmeriCorp members with an opportunity to hit their minimum number of hours necessary. I am not familiar with any Summer Programs that MSAD #70 may have that would provide the opportunity to make up the hours. It is true they didn't have any other partners, but this is a fairly large school district and works with six different municipalities.

### **Past Performance**

- While no prior grant was mentioned (not required), MSAD 70 is a school district that is held to fairly rigorous budget and financial standards. As such, it should be able to handle this grant and its administration subject to someone being specifically tasked with doing so.
- School Districts are organized and run differently than most non-profits. Many of them have to handle and administer federal funds on a regular basis (E-RATE, Special Education Funding, Federal Free and Reduced Lunch, etc.). These are highly regulated funds and School Districts are well poised to handle this aspect of federal grants and accountability. The need to manage volunteers is intrinsic in school districts due to their public nature, ranging from Parent Teacher Organizations, to Public Board Meetings, and Town Meetings.

### **Financial Plan**

- See staff review of budget. More than the anticipated number of errors; explanations and required elements missing.
- Multiple required aspects of the Financial Plan were not included, thus making my assessment an Incomplete assessment.

### **Fiscal Systems**

- As a Maine school district, it has all of the tools and systems in place that are necessary to administer and manage these funds so long as the individual responsible for doing so is clearly identified and trained on the specifics of the grant requirements.
- The infrastructure and nature of School Districts require high level of detail, policy, and procedure when it comes to the accounting of finances. Income comes from many different sources (Municipal, State, Federal, etc.) as is seen in their financials. Their financial position is strong. The one thing to note is that the school district does appear to have taken out a loan to help with cash flow, but this is not uncommon in school districts where the timing of receiving funds can be inconsistent and spread out (warrants from towns, federal special education dollars, reimbursements, etc.)

## SUMMARY APPRAISAL

1. *Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant?*

Possibly.

- While the grant itself was not well presented and compelling, a school district in Maine should have the capability of handling such a grant in light of our goal to reach out to smaller agencies or those that have not previously had a grant.
- Have a major concern about their ability to meet the required number of hours to provide the educational award to the AmeriCorp member.

*What elements of the proposal are unclear?*

- Budget needs to be cleaned up. Two concerns: first, the member supervision should be clarified as it seems to be spread among numerous individuals without a clear line of reporting/accountability/support. Second, someone in the business office needs to be specifically charged with the responsibility of becoming familiar with all of the grant requirements and ensuring compliance.
- Some of the details in the execution and oversight of the program were unclear, as well as some of the aspects that were in the financial plan. What is the use of the computer, the travel seemed estimated and the cost of health care was also uncertain. Because background checks are mandatory for all staff working with children in school districts, I am not as concerned about the question regarding staff having background checks.

*What else do you have to say about this proposal?*

- See all comments above. Given the goal of our rural grants -- to provide funds to small agencies with no prior MCCS grants -- ratings might be a bit too harsh.
- A school district tends to be much more complicated than the running of a non-profit organization and this should be taken into consideration when assessing this grant. There are many moving parts and some of the aspects of running a school district are strictly regulated by State and Federal guidelines.